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A METHOD OF  
PRAYER

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MADAME

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# A METHOD OF PRAYER.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

SO ENTITLED BY

MADAME DE LA MOTHE GUYON.

BY THOMAS C. UPHAM,

PROFESSOR OF MENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN BOWDOIN COLL. U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE, RELIGIOUS OPINIONS, AND

EXPERIENCE OF MADAME GUYON," ETC.



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## PREFACE.

**H**E Method of Prayer is a work remarkable in the age that Madame Guyon lived in, as coming from a *woman*, and still more remarkable when contrasted with the prevalent views and practices of her church. Its doctrines are essentially Protestant, making Faith, in distinction from the merits of works, the foundation of the Religious Life, and even carrying the power of Faith, in the renovation of our inward nature, beyond what is commonly found in Protestant writers of the time. Madam Guyon, however, always insisted that the doctrines which she advanced were the true Catholic doctrines.

The following analysis of the work is printed from the “Life and Experience of Madame Guyon.”\* Its separate publication in the present form having been recommended by friends who possess the work, as likely to be useful to a greater number of persons than can ever be expected to read a larger book.

The language of the original “Method of Prayer” has not been followed precisely ; but, with some slight variation of arrangement, the idea is given scrupulously, and it is hoped the object aimed at by its separate publication will be attained.

Books are God’s instruments of good, as well as sermons. He who cannot preach may talk ; and he who cannot do either may, perhaps, write. A good book laid conscientiously upon God’s altar is no small thing. How abundant is the evidence of this. Doddridge’s “Rise and Progress of Religion ;” Baxter’s “Saints’ Rest ;” “The Imitation of Christ ;” and many

\* Post 8vo. Fourth Edition, London, 1858.

other works which might be mentioned, have exerted a wide influence of the most salutary kind, felt in every part of the world, and perpetuated from generation to generation.\*

\* The “Method of Prayer” was first published in 1684; in reference to it Madame Guyon says: “Among my intimate friends was a civilian, a counsellor of the Parliament of Grenoble, who might be described as a model of piety. Seeing on my table my manuscript treatise on Prayer, he desired me to lend it to him. Being much pleased with it, he lent it to some of his friends. Others wanted copies of it. He resolved, therefore, to have it printed. The proper ecclesiastical permissions and approbations were obtained. I was requested to write a Preface, which I did.

“Under these circumstances this book, which, within a few years, passed through five or six editions, was given to the world. The Lord has given a great blessing to this little treatise; but it has caused great excitement among those who did not accede to its principles, and has been the pretence of various trials and persecutions which I have endured.”—*Life and Experience of MADAME DE LA MOTHE GUYON.*

Jan. 1, 1859.

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## A METHOD OF PRAYER.

*Remarks in Explanation of the Use of the term Prayer.*

**S**T. PAUL (*1 Thessalonians v. 17*) has enjoined upon us “*to pray without ceasing.*” Our Saviour (*Mark xiii. 33*) requires us “*to take heed, to watch, and to pray.*” But what is that prayer? It is obviously something more than the formal offering up of specific petitions. The prayer of which I speak is that *state of the heart in which it is united to God in faith and love.*

A man who has this heart may pray at all times. It is the natural, the spontaneous flow-

ing out of the heart, in the issues of its own moral and religious life. All classes of persons, in all ages and in all situations, may pray. If they have the spirit of prayer, how can they help praying?

Prayer, then, and *religion*, are the same thing.



*All without the Spirit of Prayer are invited  
to seek it.*

OME, ye famishing souls, who find nought whereon to feed, come, and ye shall be satisfied ! Come, ye poor afflicted ones, who groan beneath your load of wretchedness and pain, and ye shall find ease and comfort ! Come, ye sick, to your Physician, and be not fearful of approaching Him, because ye are filled with diseases. Expose them to His view, and they shall be healed ! Children, draw near to your Father, and He will embrace you in the arms of love. Come, ye poor, wandering sheep, return to your Shepherd ! Come, sinners, to your Saviour ! Let all, without exception, come ! for Jesus Christ hath called all. Yet, let not those come who are without a heart ; those who are without a heart are not asked ; for there must be a heart, in the natural sense of the term at least, in order that there may be LOVE. But of whom can it be said that he is really without a heart ?

*Directions to a Person very ignorant and without Religion, in respect to the Manner in which he may properly seek it.*

 WILL suppose that they hardly know anything, or are hardly capable of knowing anything, *except the Lord's Prayer*. And this is my direction: let them begin with what they are supposed to know, namely, the Lord's Prayer. Let them say, **OUR FATHER**, and stop there; remaining in respectful silence and meditation; pondering a little upon the meaning of the words, and especially upon the infinite willingness of God to become *their* Father. And before they go further, let them utter the petition, that He may become to them individually what He is so willing to be.

Let them proceed then to the petition, **THY KINGDOM COME**. And delaying upon this as before, until they can imbibe its *spirit*, which is one of the most important things in this pro-

cess, let them apply the petition, as in the preceding instance, to *themselves*; beseeching this King of glory to reign in them, and endeavouring, with Divine assistance, to yield to Him the just claim He has over them, and to resign themselves wholly to His Divine government.

Then let them take another petition:—**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS DONE IN HEAVEN.** And here let them humble themselves before God, and earnestly supplicate that God's will, His *whole* will, may be accomplished in their hearts, *in* them and *by* them, for ever. And knowing that God's will is accomplished in us when we love Him, it is the same thing if they should pray God to enable them to love Him with all their heart. And in doing this, however sinful and unworthy they may be, let them be calm and peaceable; not disturbed and agitated, as if there were no Saviour, no Divine Shepherd, who is the daily nourishment of His people, and feeds His flock, as it were, with *Himself*; not fearful and distrustful, as if God were not merciful or might not be true to His promises, when He pledges forgiveness for Christ's sake.

*Additional Directions for those who are  
beginning to seek Religion.*

**P**ERSONS are not to overburden themselves with frequent repetitions of set forms of prayer. Our Saviour says, “*When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.*” Begin with the Lord’s Prayer as the simplest and best. Go over it slowly, calmly, believably; not being in a hurry to go over the whole and then to repeat it, as if the result depended on the repetition, and the number of repetitions; but delaying upon each petition.

Place God before you as the Being to whom you are to be reconciled, and from whom you are to receive all good. But be careful not to form *any image of the Deity*. The idea of God, whatever may be sometimes thought, can never be represented and set forth by anything which the eye beholds or the hand touches, by any-

thing which exists in sculpture and painting. “*God is a Spirit,*” says the Saviour, “*and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*”

Do not forget Him who is the way, the truth, and the life, the Saviour, the second person in the ever-blessed Trinity. He is the *way*. Enter to God *through* Him. Behold Him in the various states of His Incarnation. You are a man, with all of man’s feebleness and temptations;—behold Him assuming humanity in order that He may sympathize with you. You are a sinner;—behold Him upon the cross, dying that you might live. In the Lord’s Prayer, God offers Himself to you. Uttering that prayer in Christ, who is the mediatorial way, you receive God; and in receiving Him, you receive the true and everlasting life.

Persevere in this way, asking for few things, and such as are very essential, found in the Lord’s Prayer; pausing upon each with a calm and silent looking up to God through Christ; ceasing from your own strength in order that you may find strength in the Saviour by faith.

*Directions applicable to Persons of some degree of Knowledge and Education.*

 HOSE who have more knowledge, men of reading, may very properly avail themselves of their intellectual position in furthering this great object. The directions already given are exceedingly important to them. But in addition, let them read books on *experimental religion*, delaying upon the most important truths, and praying over them, till the power which is in them, being made alive by the Holy Ghost, is felt in the heart.

Meditation also, as distinct from reading, is to be practised on similar principles. In retirement, endeavour, by a lively act of faith, to realize the relations in which you stand to God, and place yourself, as it were, in His immediate presence. In general, this is the first great thought upon which the mind should be occupied;—God is; God is *present*; God is our

*Father*; to Him we *owe all*. Let the mind repose calmly and believably upon these great truths, and other important religious truths, in which there is substance and food for the inquiring mind—such as our lost condition by nature, Christ our Mediator, God the inward Teacher of men in the person of the Holy Ghost; dwell quietly and humbly, with the senses and thoughts withdrawn from the circumference to the centre. Thus wait upon the Lord with strong desire, but without agitation.



*Of an increased or higher Degree of  
Religious Experience.*

**H**E soul has at first but a little *realizing* sense of God. It says, *my Father*, it is true, but says it very *tremblingly*. But after a time it gains strength. It begins to see more and more distinctly how God, whom as a sinner it feared, can be fully reconciled. It believes more fully in God, because it believes more fully in Christ, who is the only way of access.

In this advanced state the soul begins to recognize the great truth, that our love to God should be without selfishness, and that our will should be perfectly united in His will. The servant, who only proportions his diligence to the hope of *reward*, renders himself unworthy of all reward. We must learn to seek God in distinction from His gifts, and God is in His **WILL**. Supposing, then, that God should smite you with afflictions without and temptations within, and should leave the soul in a state of

entire aridity, do what God requires you to do, and suffer what He requires you to suffer ; but in everything be resigned and patient ! With humility of spirit, with a sense of your own nothingness, with the reiterated breathings of an ardent but peaceful affection, and with inward submission and quietness, you must wait the return of the Beloved. In this way you will demonstrate that *it is God Himself alone* and His good pleasure which you seek, and *not the selfish delights of your own sensations.*



*Of Abandonment or entire Consecration to  
God in all things.*

**B**UT this cannot well be done without the principle of *abandonment*; by which I mean that act in which we resign, abandon, or consecrate ourselves entirely to God. Those who are consecrated have given their own wills into the keeping of God's will. Such a soul is resigned in all things, whether for soul or body, whether for time or eternity; by leaving what is past in oblivion; by leaving what is to come to the decisions of Providence; and by devoting to God, without any reserve, the *present moment*;—a moment which necessarily brings with it God's eternal order of things, and in everything, excepting sin, is a declaration to us of His will as certain and infallible as it is inevitable and common to us all.

*Of the Test or Trial of Consecration.*

OD will give us opportunities to try our test, whether it be a true one or not. No man can be wholly the Lord's, unless he is wholly consecrated to the Lord; and no man can know whether he is thus wholly consecrated, except by *tribulation*. That is the test. To rejoice in God's will, when that will imparts nothing but happiness, is easy even for the natural man. But none but the renovated man, none but the religious man, can rejoice in the Divine will, when it crosses his path, disappoints his expectations, and overwhelms him with sorrow. Trial, therefore, instead of being shunned, should be welcomed as the test, and the only true test, of a true state.

Beloved souls ! There are consolations which pass away ; but ye will not find true and abiding consolation except in entire abandonment, and in that love which loves the *cross*. He who does not welcome the cross, does not welcome God.

*Inward Holiness the true Regulator of the outward Life.*

**W**HEN we have the true life *within*, we may reasonably be expected to have the truly regulated life *without*. “Love,” says St. Augustine, “*and do what you please.*” If we have love without selfishness, it will not fail to work itself out in appropriate and right issues. The inordinate action of the senses arises obviously from the errors and perversions of the inward state. Mortify the inward man; and you can hardly fail to mortify and regulate the outward man.



*Of gradual Growth or Advancement in the Religious Life.*

HE soul fully given up in faith and love is astonished to find God gradually taking possession of its whole being. One of the evidences of growth in grace is a tendency to cease from ourselves, in order that God Himself, in the operation of the Holy Ghost, may exist and act in us.

A soul in this state is *prepared* for all times, places, and occasions ; for society, for worship, for outward action. When, through weakness of purpose, or want of faith, we become, as it were, *uncentred*, it is of immediate importance to turn again gently and sweetly inward ; and thus bring the soul into harmony with the desires and purposes of God. The more the soul becomes like God, the more clearly it discerns God's excellencies ; and the more distinctly and fully it feels His attracting power.

*Of a Knowledge of our inward Sins when  
Souls are in this advanced State.*

 If a soul, in this intimate nearness with God, should be left to fall into any error or sin, it would be immediately thrown into the greatest confusion and inward condemnation. God becomes the incessant examiner of the soul ; but still in such a way, that the soul, moving in the Divine light, can see and examine for itself.

When we fall into errors, and even undoubted sins, the rules of inward holy living require us not to vex and disquiet ourselves ; but simply, in deep humiliation and penitence, to turn calmly and believably, without fear and without agitation, to Him who forgives willingly, to that cross of Christ where it can be truly said that wounded souls are healed. Great agitation and vexation of mind are not necessarily *penitence* nor the result of penitence, but are rather the result of *unbelief*.

*Of the Manner in which we are to meet  
and resist Temptations.*

 TEMPTATIONS may be resisted in two ways. One way is to resist them in a *direct contest*. The other method is, to turn away the mind from the contemplation of the evil in its outward form, and to keep it fixed, if possible, still more closely and watchfully upon God. A little child, on perceiving a monster, does not wait to fight with it, and will scarcely turn its eyes toward it; but quickly shrinks into the bosom of its mother, in entire confidence of safety; so likewise should the soul turn from the dangers of temptation to her God. "God is in the midst of her," saith the Psalmist, "she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." (*Psalms xlvi. 5.*)

If in our weakness we attempt to attack our enemies, we shall frequently be wounded, if not totally defeated; but by casting ourselves into the simple presence of God, in the exercise of

faith, we shall find instant supplies of strength for our support. This was the succour sought for by David. "I have set," saith he, "the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." (*Psalm xvi. 8, 9.*) And it is said in Exodus, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."



*Of the Soul in the State of pure or  
unselfish Love.*

**W**HEN we have given ourselves to God in abandonment, and have exercised faith in God that He does now, and that He will ever receive us and make us one with Himself, then God becomes central in the soul, and all which is the opposite of God gradually *dissolves itself*, if one may so speak, and passes away.

SELF is now destroyed. The soul, recognizing God as its centre, is filled with a love, which, as it places God first, and everything else in the proper relation to Him, may be regarded as *pure*. It is not until we arrive at this state, in the entire destruction and loss of self, that we acknowledge, in the highest and truest sense, God's supreme existence ; still less *do we*, or *can we*, have God *as a life within us*.

In experimental religion there are two great and important views—perhaps there are none

more important—which are expressed by the single terms, the **ALL** and the **NOTHING**. We must become *Nothing* in ourselves before we can receive the *All* or *Fulness* of God.

*Of the Practice of the Prayer of Silence.*

**W**HEN the soul has reached this degree of experience, it is disposed to practise the **PRAyER OF SILENCE**, so called, not merely because it excludes the voice, but because it has so simplified its petitions, that it has hardly anything to say, except to breathe forth, in a desire **UNsPOKEN**,—*Thy will be done*. This prayer, so simple, and yet so comprehensive, may be said to embody the whole state of the soul. And believing that this prayer is and must be fulfilled *moment by moment*, the constant fruition crowns the constant request, and it rejoices in what it *has*, as well as in what it *seeks*. The soul in this Divine prayer acts more nobly and more extensively than it had ever

done before ; since God Himself is its mover, and it now acts as it is acted upon by the agency of the Holy Ghost. When St. Paul speaks of our being led by the Spirit of God, it is not meant that we should cease from action ; but that our action should be in harmony with and in subordination to the Divine action. This is finely represented by the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the wheels, which had a living spirit ; and whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went ; they ascended and descended as they were moved ; for the spirit of life was in them, and they returned not when they went.

We promote the highest activity by inculcating *a total dependence on the Spirit of God as our moving principle* ; for it is in Him, and by Him alone, that “we live and move and have our being.”



*Of the true Relation of Human and  
Divine Activity.*

 N the early periods of his Christian experience man is required to labour much, strive much, act much, obviously to conquer himself, to smite and annul his own selfishness, to restrain and regulate his own multiplied and unholy activity, in order that he may be rendered submissive and quiet before God. While the tablet is unsteady, it is obvious that the painter is unable to delineate a true copy.

It is thus in the inward life. Every act of our own unsubdued and selfish spirit, even while God is operating upon it, is productive of false and erroneous lineaments.

“ If any man be in Christ,” says the Apostle Paul, “ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” But this state of things can be made to exist only by our dying to ourselves and to all our own activity, except so far as it is kept in

*subordination to Divine grace*, in order that the activity of God may be substituted in its stead. Instead, therefore, of prohibiting activity, we enjoin it ; but we enjoin it in absolute dependence on the Spirit of God ; so that the Divine activity, considered as antecedent in action, and as giving authority to action, may take the place of the human. "Jesus Christ," we are told, "hath the life in Himself;" and nothing but the grace which flows through Him is, or can be, the moral and religious life of His people.



*Of the Nature and Conditions of the State  
of Divine Union, or Union with God.*

HE result of all religion is to bring us into union with God. We are made one with Him in understanding, when, by renouncing our own wisdom, we seek continually and believably for wisdom from on high ; one in affection, when we desire and love what He desires and loves ; one in will, when our purposes are as His are.

The Divine WILL never varies, and never can vary, from the line of perfect rectitude on the one hand, and of perfect love on the other. This is the law of its movement, unchangeable as the Divine existence.

There can be no true moral union between God and man, until the human will is brought into harmony with the Divine.

And this life of union, which is the highest and most glorious result of our being, is the gift of God. A fundamental condition of it is, that we shall resign ourselves to Him, that we

may be His in all things, and that we may receive this and all other blessings at His hand. God alone can accomplish it. Still, the creature must *consent* to have it done. God loves His creatures; God is the source of light to them; God in Christ is the true Saviour. But man must, at least, recognize his alienation, and, in becoming willing and desirous to be saved, must expand his soul to the Divine operation. The creature, therefore, must open the window; it is the least he can do; but it is the sun himself, the Eternal Sun, that must give the light.



*Of false Pretensions to a State of Sanctification and Divine Union.*

**B**UT some will say, that persons may feign this state who do not possess it. A person may just as well feign this state and no more, as the poor suffering man, who is on the point of perishing with hunger, can for a length of time feign to be full and satisfied. *There he is*, no matter what his pretensions may be ; his looks, his countenance, show his condition. Men may pretend to be wholly the Lord's, by harmony of affection and will, and by being in entire moral union with Him ; but if they are not so, there will certainly be something in look, in word, or in action, which will show it.



*Appeal to Religious Pastors and Teachers.*

HE cause of our being so unsuccessful in reforming mankind, especially the lower class, is our beginning with external matters; in this way, if we produce any fruit, it is fruit which perishes. We should begin with principles, which reach the interior, and tend to renovate the heart. This is the true and the ready process; to teach men to seek and to know God in the heart—by affections rather than by forms. Thus we lead the soul to the fountain.

Impressed with the importance of the religion of the heart, I beseech all, who have the care of souls, to put them at once into the spiritual way. Preach to them Jesus Christ. He Himself, by the precious blood He hath shed for those intrusted to you, conjures you to speak, not to that which is *outward*, but to the *heart* of His Jerusalem. O ye dispensers of His graces, ye preachers of His word, ye ministers of His sacraments, labour to establish Christ's

kingdom ! As it is the heart alone which can oppose Christ's sovereignty, so it is by the subjection of the heart that His sovereignty is most highly exalted. Employ means, compose catechisms, and whatever other methods may be proper, but aim at the *heart*. Teach the prayer of the heart, and not of the understanding: the prayer of God's Spirit, and not of man's invention.

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